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# The Role of Motilal Tejawat in Tribal Movement of Rajasthan

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#### ANNOTATION

Motilal Tejawat (Hindi: मोतीलाल तेजावत), (1885–1963) was the leader of the Eki Movement that was agitated in the 1920s in the adivasi-dominated border areas of present-day Rajasthan. Motilal Tejawat was born in Koliyari (now in Jhadol tehsil, Udaipur district, Rajasthan) in 1886. After being educated to the fifth grade, he was employed in the Jhadol thikana (in present-day Jhadol tehsil) for some time. During his stint at Jhadol, he witnessed the oppressive behavior of the thakur and his henchmen towards the local Bhil people, which prompted him to resign his position in 1920.[2] He then worked for a shopkeeper in Udaipur city. Soon after obtaining new employment, Tejawat was sent by his employer to Jhadol on business, where the thakur ordered him to hand over building material belonging to Tejawat's employer; he refused to oblige, and was beaten up and imprisoned by the thakur until Tejawat's employer was able to arrange for his release. Following this experience, Tejawat gave up his job in Udaipur and devoted himself to full-time political activity. Motilal Tejawat's immediate source of inspiration was the Bijolia movement. Tejawat came in contact with pamphlets originating from the Bijolia Movement and proceeded to make copies of and distribute the pamphlets in Bhil-majority areas. Tejawat organized several meetings in Bhil villages in the erstwhile estate of Jhadol, which resulted in the formation of a committee that sought to articulate the grievances and demands of the Bhil peasantry. Tejawat saw his movement as being part of the larger independence movement in India led by, among others, Gandhi. He is said to have stated during speeches that once 'Gandhi raj' was established, the agitators would have to pay only one anna in the rupee (i.e., 6%) to their rulers. Tejawat had been outlawed by the Udaipur state, which had announced a Rs-500 reward on his head. Tejawat was arrested in Khedbrahma on June 4, 1929, by police belonging to Idar State, and handed over the Mewar State. Tejawat was held in Udaipur, without trial, until his release on April 23, 1939.

**KEYWORDS:** Motilal Tejawat, Tribal Movement, Rajasthan, Villages, Outlawed, Employer, Mewar, Bhil.

## Introduction

The beginning of the Eki Movement is generally attributed to the events at the Matrikund fair in Chittod. Here, a group of adivasis agreed to desist from paying taxes to jagirdars until the Maharana addressed the problems with the jagirdari system. The immediate inspiration for the movement was Motilal Tejawat's[1,2] exposure to the Bijolia movement. Pamphlets associated with the Bijolia movement were circulating throughout Mewar around 1920. Tejawat distributed copies of these pamphlets in Jharol thikana, whose jagirdar was known to oppress adivasi<sup>[]</sup> and followed up by calling a series of meeting

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in adivasi villages in the area, leading to formation of a committee that sought to articulate the grievances and demands of the adivasi peasantry.

In May 1921, Tejawat was able to utilize a large gathering of adivasi peasants at the annual peasant fair Matri Mundiya near Chittor to spread his message and mobilize his followers on the issues of begar and unfair taxation. After the fair, a large number of protesting peasants marched to Udaipur to seek an audience with the Maharana who agreed to meet them and conceded some, but not all demands. Three important issues on which the Maharana granted no concession were: the use of forests by adivasis, begar, and the rounding up of adivasis for the royal shikhar (hunt). The reformist newspaper 'Navin Rajasthan' strongly supported the Eki Movement. The newspaper condemned the violence against the movement in the states of Idar and Sirohi, and Vijay Singh Pathik wrote a series of articles highlighting the conditions of the adivasis that gave rise to the movement. Navin Rajasthan sent Ram Narain Chaudhary to study the situation. [4] The newspapers 'Lokvani' and 'Praja Sevak' also published articles on the conditions of the peasants associated with the Eki Movement. Gandhi did not approve of Tejawat's methods and distanced himself from Tejawat in an article in Young India. I hear that a gentleman by name Motilal Pancholi hailing from Udaipur claims to be my disciple and to preach temperance and what not among the rustics of the Rajputana States. He is reported to be surrounded by an armed crowd of admirers and establishing his kingdom or some other -dom wherever he goes. He claims too, miraculous powers.[3,4]He or his admirers are reported to have done some destructive work. I wish that people will once and for all understand that I have no disciples. On March 7, 1922, several thousand agitators gathered in the village of Palchitaria in Idar State (the village was renamed Dadhvav and now lies in Vijaynagar taluka, Sabarkantha district in present-day Gujarat). Troops of the Mewar Bhil Corps under the command of Major H.G. Sutton opened fire on the crowds. While Major Sutton described the engagement as a 'skirmish' in which 22 persons were killed, local oral tradition claims that between 1,000 and 1,500 were killed. Tejawat himself managed to escape the carnage, and the movement continued for another two months.

The events at Dadhvav received little coverage in the then-contemporary press, and is often an ignored chapter in later historical accounts. While some claim that this oversight is because "those killed were poor, illiterate tribals", at least one historian attributes the oversight to the fact that "Motilal Tejawat's movement did not conform to Gandhain precepts...[and]...publicity about the massacre did not at the moment accord with the overall political agenda of the nationalist leadership." On May 8, 1922, the villages of Bhula and Balohiya were besieged by police who fired shots on the Bhil residents and set fire to houses. According to one journalistic account of the event, 1,800 Bhils were killed and 640 houses were burnt or destroyed. By the end of May 1922, the movement had "all but collapsed." After getting educated upto fifth grade, he started working at the Jhadol tehsil for some time [5,6] where he witnessed the suppression of the local Bhil people from the hands of the Thakur and the British. This prompted him to resign from his post and he started working for a shopkeeper in Udaipur City. After being newly employed, he was sent to Jhadol for a business where the Thakur ordered him to handover the building material belonging to Tejawat's employer which he refused to oblige, for which, he was mercilessly beaten and imprisoned. He was so much pained and humiliated that he decided to leave his job and devote himself to full time political activity. The Bijolia movement had a huge impact on Tejawat and he was greatly moved by it. He, somehow came in contact with the pamphlets of that movement and distributed them to people in Bhil majority areas. He organized several meetings in Bhil villages and was successful in organizing committees that were keen on articulating the grievances and demands of the Bhil people. The slowly increasing mass movement in Bhil villages gave Tejawat confidence and he started associating his movement being part of the large Independence movement

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of the country led by, amongst many others, Gandhi ji. He was a big supporter of an upcoming "Gandhi Raj". His efforts had slowly began to show some good signs and he was able to put together a large gathering of Adiwasi peasants for the annual peasants fair Matri Mundiya near Chittor to spread his message and mobilize his people on the issues of Begar and unfair taxation. After the fair, large number of people started marching towards Udaipur to meet the Maharana who had agreed to meet them and listen to their problems and demands. But there were many important issues on which the Maharana didn't gave any concession like: the use of forests by the Adiwasis, Begar and the grouping of the Adiwasi people for the Shikar. Many reformist newspapers supported the Eki movement and several articles were published in the newspapers like 'Navin Rajasthan'. Some newspapers published articles about the conditions of the Adiwasis and the farmers associated with the movement. At noon on March 7, 1922, Mewar Bhil Corps (MBC), a paramilitary force commanded by British officer, Major H.G. Sutton, open fired on a large gathering of Adivasis led by Motilal Tejawat . Constant firing resulted into the deaths of around 1200 people and many more were seriously injured. While Major Sutton described the massacre as a 'skirmish' in which only 22 people were killed. Tejawat somehow managed to escape and the movement continued for another couple of months. The merciless killing of so many people had no effect on the British and on 8th May 1922, the villages of Bhula and Balohiya were besieged by the British soldiers who fired shots on the residents and set the houses to fire killing around 1800 people and 640 houses were burnt to ashes. By the end of 1922, the Eki movement had collapsed.[7,8]

Having faced the aftermaths of the public massacres before, the British used all their might to curb the spread of the news of another, but more brutal massacre, amongst different parts of the country. No one came to know about the incident and the British took such extraordinary measures to suppress the incident that even the Rajasthan State Archives Department has no reference of the massacre whatsoever. L.P. Mathur, a retired associate professor of history from Udaipur University said "It appears that the Palchitaria massacre was completely suppressed. The official records of the period on Tejawat and his movement clearly state that he and his Bhil followers had moved in the direction of Palchitaria from Walren village near Khedbrahma (65 km west of Palchitaria) on February 18 1922, 17 days before the incident. In the archives, there is a telegram to this effect from the political agent at Khedbrahma to his counterpart in Kherwada." He added that as a research student he had come around many such incidents of atrocities that the British rulers had blacked out. Koyaji Dhulaji Patel's description of the massacre says that what he saw was unbelievable. People were falling of like ninepins to the Bullets. The British soldiers were killing people even for their silver ornaments. He said that he remembered one man vividly, Nathaji Mothaliya, of nearby village whom the British shot before removing the silver bangles of his wrist. The corpses that were lying all over the place were thrown in a well nearby which was filled up to its rim. Somehow it was of no one's interest that the ruthless killings that took place in Palchitaria should come out. Neither the landlords nor the nationalist movements. Tejawat somehow managed to escape but recieved to bullet shots on his thighs and was seriously injured. He was rescued by some of his supporters and was taken into the hills where he stayed for many years till he surrendered on the request of Mahatma Gandhi in 1929 and remained imprisoned thereafter. He died in Udaipur in 1963. After the Independence, he visited Palchitaria, the site of the incident to pay his respects to the martyrs of 1922. He addressed a gathering of people and the relatives of those killed two decades earlier, he named the spot of the massacre as 'Virbhumi' and requested everyone to hold a fair in their memory on March 7thevery year.[9,10]

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## Discussion

The Pal-Dadhvav massacre took place on 7th March, 1922, in the Pal-Chitariya and Dadhvaav villages of Sabarkantha district, then part of Idar state (Now Gujrat). The day was Amalki Ekadashi, which falls just before Holi, a major festival for tribals. Villagers from Pal, Dadhvav, and Chitariya had gathered on the banks of river Heir as part of the 'Eki movement', led by one Motilal Tejawat. Tejawat, who belonged to Koliyari village in the Mewad region of Rajasthan, had also mobilised Bhils from Kotda Chhavni, Sirohi, and Danta to participate. The impact of the protest was felt in Vijaynagar, Dadhvaav, Poshina and Khedbrahma, which are now talukas of Sabarkantha; the Aravalli districts, Banaskantha and Danta of Banaskantha district; and Kotda Chhavni, Dungarpur, Chittor, Sirohi, Banswada and Udaipur of Rajasthan, all of which were then princely states. The movement was to protest against the land revenue tax (lagaan) imposed on the peasants by the British and feudal lords. The British Paramilitary force was on hunt for Tehawat. It heard of this gathering and reached the spot. Nearly 200 bhils under the leadership of Tehawat lifted their bows and arrows. But, the Britishers opened fire on them. Nearly 1,000 tribals (Bhils) fell to bullets. While the British claimed some 22 people were killed, the Bhils believe 1,200-1,500 of them died. Tejwat, however, escaped and later "returned to the spot to christen it 'Veer Bhumi'. From the literature, materials and documents available for research today, it can be concluded that Motilal Tejawat's tribal movement had a wide impact in the tribal areas of present-day Rajasthan besides present-day North Gujarat. The influence of this movement was so enormous and widespread that social, religious and political changes were made possible. This historic movement was initiated by Tejawat at a religious fair held at Dharmasthan Matrkundia on the banks of Banas river in Chittorgarh district. Persuaded the Maidani of one lakh or so, [11,12]decided not to pay taxes until a proper response to the demand was received and took an oath of Lord Eklingji to implement it. Tejawat was thinking of the next steps to avoid a situation like 'Sethni Shikhaman to Zapa'. A copy of the circular regarding the declaration was given to the committee formed per village. This had a massive impact on the bureaucrats and grow among them.Unprecedented among poor These circulars are in the village of Bhils, which has a majority of tribals, in the midst of joy and excitement. Motilal secretly delivered about 60 chopanias to Sarada district of Mewar. Because the Bhils there had only two things: land and constant persecution. Unfortunately this land is also a mountainous region The yield was high and low, not flat How much can be understood. Due to the complete lack of complete agricultural facilities in Adhura, they were helpless to subsist on wood and grass harvested from the forest area.

In the midst of this calamity, zamindars, contractors, jagirdars, government employees and middlemen were forcefully collecting two or three times the nominal income. Being able to pay this meant suffering insults and beatings in bonuses. No one will hear a complaint against this, but if you dare, you will be beaten more in compensation.

Helplessness, dissatisfaction and pain lie deep inside A fire was constantly burning. of rebellion Fires very easily in violent agitation[13,14] could have been transformed, but non-violent struggle was Motilal Tejawat's 'eki' (ie unity movement)was a prerequisite. Only by eliminating injustice-tyranny against remoteness Instead of making goals, Tejawat wanted that Tribals should be freed from the evil of certain wrong customs and habits. He developed two indomitable weapons: unity and non-violence.Instead of instilling big and false dreams in the eyes of gullible tribals, he told everyone that what is our minimum need? What and how much is needed for peaceful living? Explaining each point with logic and love, it sinks into the throat like Shira.

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Tejawat's transparent personality, sunshine-like goal and utterly selfless initiative won him the trust and love of tribals and small farmers. An unbreakable bridge of trust and cordial relationship was formed between the leader and the followers. This movement was to be powered by trust and intimacy in a way that is considered very rare. Even though the tribals were quite illiterate and naive, they understood what their interests were and who were their true benefactors. That is why all the tribes were sensibly agreeing to adhere to Tejana's main point against joining 'Eki'.

The Ten Commandments of Motilal Tejawat were: (1) Never drink alcohol, (2) Do not eat animal flesh, (3) Do not marry the widow of one brother by force, (4) Wife cannot remarry if her husband is alive., (5) A man who abducts someone's wife shall be punished with heavy fine. (6) A widow can remarry as per her wish. (7) Do not take dowry in marriage of a virgin girl. (8) If a man and a woman engage in immoral sexual relations, to expel them from the marriage. (9) Abstaining from stealing and looting and (10) Not eating from the hands of Muslims, Oilies etc.

The tenth point in this is difficult to understand at present. But each and every Bhil understood the reason behind this objective that it had its own goodness. The Bhils accepted these Ten Commandments so wholeheartedly that their unity gradually became a strength.

Five persons from Zadol came forward to give active support to Motilal Tejawat's agitation: (1) Kishan Joshi, (2) Lachchiram Sadhu, (3) Neela Shankar Brahmabhat, (4) Bala Luhar and (5) Ambava Kumbar, like a rash leader, who immediately gave up allies or followers. Accepted Instead, Motilal took him to the temple of Lord Shankar. By laying hands on the idol of God there. Sworn that we will always stand by each other and continue to work hard for the success of the movement. After this ceremony, five people went to different villages with copies of the declaration. [15,16] After Zadol, Flasia village came under Tejawat's radar. It can be said that Sri Ganesh of Eki Andolan took place in these two villages only. He realized that now the tribals have become more and more aware. They are getting ready for conflict. The iron was heating up and the time was right for the hammer to strike was getting closer. Of course, not only the victory but also the fight against established interests was very difficult but sometimes one has to start somewhere, somebody. Motilal Tejawat was well aware of that fact.

### **Results**

British colonialists tried their level best to crush the post-war popular upsurge through sheer repression. The worst instance of repression in this period was the barbaric Jallianwallahbagh massacre in Amritsar on 13 April, 1919. The infamous General Dyer who executed this massacre defended it in terms of "producing a moral effect" and his only regret was that had he not run out of ammunition he could have killed many more! In the face of such acute state terror and Gandhian vacillation and dilution, if the Indian people succeeded in producing a different 'moral effect' on the British administration, it was largely due to the powerful working class initiative and wider expressions of peasant discontent.

Among the powerful peasant movements of this period, mention must be made of the popular peasant agitation in UP against the arbitrary rent collection and other coercive practices by the Avadh talukdars. This agitation which acquired a strong base in Pratapgarh, Rae Bareli, Sultanpur and Faizabad districts of UP was led by Baba Ramchandra; a one-time indentured labourer in Fiji who combined a lot of Ramayana with his calls of kisan solidarity and would even describe Lenin as the dear leader of kisans. In the Mewar region of Rajasthan, Motilal Tejawat organised a powerful movement of the Bhil tribe. In August 1921, the Malabar region of Kerala was rocked by a fresh round of the intermittent Moplah rebellion. In the early 1920s, Punjab

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saw a powerful upsurge of the Jat Sikh peasantry in the form of the Akali-led Curudwara reform movement aimed at liberating the Sikh shrines from the clutches of corrupt British-backed mahants. And between 1919 and 1921, Satara district of Maharashtra witnessed a powerful anti-landlord anti-mahajan peasant upsurge led by the Satyashodhak Nana Patil who would go on to emerge as a popular communist peasant leader in the state. This study of the impact of regional and national politics on the Bhils of Rajasthan has certain limitations. Rajasthan was an Indian State and it was only in the Haripura session in 1938 that the Congress decided to extend the idea of Purna Swaraj to the 'Indian States as well. But at the same time certain restrictions were imposed on the proclaimed goals. It was declared that for the present the Congress would only extend "moral support and sympathy" to the movement in the States. Hence, the States remained considerably isolated from the mainstream of the Indian politics. Mewar, one of the regions which the present study focusses upon, witnessed the formation of a Prajamandal as late as in 1938 with the limited goal of civil liberties and responsible government under the aegis of the State chief.[17]

But that does not detract from the fact that echoes of the national events were also felt in Rajasthan, like in any other Indian State. Wilkinson in the Rajputana Agency Report of 1921 found Mewar "becoming a hot bed of lawlessness. Seditionist emissaries are teaching the people that all men are equal. The lands belong to the peasants and not to the state or landlords. It is significant that the people are being urged to use the vernacular equivalent of the word 'comrade'. The movement is mainly anti-maharana but it might soon become anti-British and spread to the adjoining British area."'Gandhi himself was quite optimistic about the role which the Bhils would finally play. He expressed his concern for and faith in their awakening in the following words: "The Bhils have been long neglected by the States and reformers; if they are given a helping hand, they can become the pride of India. All they need is the spinning wheel in their homes and schools in which their children can receive simple education. In the vast awakening that has taken place, no race can be teft out of the calculation of the states and reformers."Against the backdrop discussed above we will examine the linkages between the movement of the Bhils and the trends of regional and national politics. The study is restricted to Bijolia and Sirohl regions as the awakening and nationalist fervour left their deepest impact on 'hese two regions in the main.

Bijolia Movement: Its Background and Aftermath-In 1920, the Bhils of Mewar for the first time joined the movement launched by the peasants of Bijolia. The Dhakar Kisans of the Bijolia thikana had first joined a. movement in 1905 against the high incidence of rent, and against the existence of as many as 86 types of cesses, be^ar or forced labour and other feudal exactions. The Bijolia movement in 1920 developed contact with the Gandhian movement and was spearheaded by nationalists like Vijai Singh Pathik, Manikya Lal Verma, Haribhau Upadhyaya, Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, Sadhu Sitaram Sas, Ramnarain Coudhary, Manilal Kothari and Motilal Tejawat. These leaders tried to integrate the Bhils in the movement which was hitherto exclusively the affair of the Dhakar castes' Hence the Kisan Panchavat which was the organisational base of the movement vested in Motilal Tejawat the responsibility of organising the Bhils to draw them into the peasant movement.[18]

# **Conclusions**

Gujarat's tableau for the Republic Day parade will be themed after the tribal revolutionaries from the state who had devoted themselves to India's Independence struggle. The tableau is at least 45 feet long, 14 feet wide and 16 feet high, and comprises a seven-foot statue of Motilal Tejawat – one of the heroes who was considered as the Gandhi of Koliyari by the tribals. The tableau, designed and constructed by Siddheshwar Kanuga, owner of Smart Graph Art Private Limited – will be themed on tribal revolutionaries with a special

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focus on an incident that was considered as the "Gujarat's Jallianwala Bagh,". In this tragic incident, around 1,200 Bhils were massacred in the Pal- Chitariya and Dadhvaav Villages of the district, the part of the Idar state. Motilal Tejawat was born into a merchant family in the Adivasi dominated Kolivari village in the Mewad region of Rajasthan. Tejawat was employed by a landlord who used to exploit the tribals and threatened to beat them with shoes if they did not pay taxes, as per the author and chairperson of the Gujarat Sahitya Akademi, Vishnu Pandya and his late wife Arti Pandya in their book 'Gujarat na Krantiteertho.' Fed up with these atrocities and exploitation of tribal people, Motilal Tejawat quit his job and mobilized Bhils from Kotda Chhavni, Sirohi and Dants to participate in the event. The impact of the protest was felt in Vijaynagar, Dadhvaav, Poshina, Khedbrahma, Pal Chitariya. On March 7th 1922, the day marked Amalki Ekadashi, a major festival for the tribals, villagers from Pal Chitariya and Dadhvaav gathered on the banks of Her river under Motilal Tejawat's leadership to protest held to react against the land revenue taxes by Feudal lords and British. The Mewad Bhil Corps (MBC), a paramilitary force by the British who were on the lookout for Tejawat, heard of this event and immediately reached the spot. After Tejawat's anger-filled speech nearly 2000 Bhils raised their voices in support and shouted in unison;" we will not pay the tax" In response, the commanding officer of MBC, HG Sutton ordered his troop to fire, and as the bullets were showered a few fell to death and a few jumped into the well. This information was gathered from local old gazettes and chroniclers. As per the British records, only 22 were killed but for the Bhils that day they lost around 1,200 to 1,500 people in that firing. Motilal Tejawat was shot twice and was immediately taken back to his vicinity where he was declared dead. Gujarat's Tableau will also include a statue of Sutton and six others. Six artists have been selected to perform the pain of the tragic incident. In total there are five murals in the Gujarat Tableau depicting scenes from the incident of 1922. The Tableau has two wells on the sides to showcase the death of the Bhils.[17]

These statues showcase the bravery and courage of the tribal group. There will be a four-foot tall statue of four tribal freedom fighters. The tableau is to have two horses depicting the handmade horses the tribal people offer to their shrines in a ritualistic manner. Ten tribal artists will perform Gair, a folk dance with all traditional music and attire. A song is sung in the folklore by the tribal people addressing Motilal Tejawat as Koliyari No Vanio Gandhi will be presented along with the tableau. This incident of Pal Chitariya was brought to light by Narendra Modi when he was the Chief Minister of Gujarat. A memorial of Motilal Tejawat was built at the massacre site surrounded by a Smriti Van. The theme of the Gujarat Tableau was suggested by PM Narendra Modi himself. [18]

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